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Task force on Pupil
Transportation Finance

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Task Force on Pupil Transportation Finance

Final Report

**SUBMITTED TO STATE SUPERINTENDENT
NANCY KEENAN**

December 16, 1994

**Al McMilin, Chair
Superintendent
Townsend Public Schools
266-5512**

OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION TASK FORCE ON PUPIL TRANSPORTATION FINANCE

CHARGE TO THE TASK FORCE

A. Maintain an adequate, safe, and economical access to education for all Montana students.

1. Transportation services must continue to overcome Montana's rich diversity of geographic, social, and economic access challenges.
2. Optimum safety, as intended by the Highway Safety Act of 1966, and federal standards and guidelines embraced by Montana statutes and standards for the school bus industry, must continue to be supported.
3. Economy of service must be maximized while not diminishing safety and adequacy.

B. Utilize all available resources, including those of the public and private sectors, effectively and productively.

1. FISCAL: Present revenues include state general, state equalization account (SEA), county and district property taxes, and parents. These and other sources should be reviewed in light of current money pressures and demands.
2. DELIVERY: Existing systems include both district and privately owned school bus fleets, in addition to parent operated vehicles. These and other options not currently in use should be weighed in relation to existing, viable safety and economy parameters. Non-viable and restrictive restraints not consistent with safety and economy should be reviewed for possible removal.

C. Create a funding method which is equitable, simple, and predictable.

Any method of funding school transportation in the future must

1. assure that the cost burden is distributed among districts and responsible providers of pupil transportation services in a fair and responsive manner;
2. be easily understood;
3. require a minimum of documentation and administrative effort for budgeting, disbursement, and monitoring (state, county, district, or other);
4. be capable of providing stability in the level of funding;
5. remove financial incentives for incorporating management practices which are not cost effective nor within the intentions of the model; and
6. be as objective and as automated as possible.

D. Recommend pupil transportation delivery practices consistent with safety and economy.

Of the models and options which are not currently in use, and those which are, the ones that represent the most efficient and productive use of available resources should be identified.

PUPIL TRANSPORTATION TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

<p style="text-align: center;">TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM</p> <p>The Task Force (TF) is unanimous in the belief that Montana needs a system to transport students to and from school that includes the use of the yellow school bus.</p>	<p>► No action required.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">SCHOOL BUS FUNDING FOR HOME-TO-SCHOOL AND BACK</p> <p>The TF endorses the present state county-supported mileage reimbursement model with the following modifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Weight student bus ridership to reflect the amount of space they occupy on the bus, including students with disabilities. ◆ No longer deem a bus "full" just because it carries a special education student who's Individualized Education Plan requires transportation as a related service. ◆ Calculate reimbursement by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● counting all eligible elementary students, and ● counting only the eligible high school students which ride during a week designated to count riders. 	<p>(The TF recommends weighting, spec. ed. and counting be tied together and one not be approved without the others.)</p> <p>► Included in bill draft.</p> <p>► Requires change in A.R.M. Does not require change in statute.</p> <p>► Included in bill draft.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">INDIVIDUAL ROOM AND BOARD AND TRANSPORTATION CONTRACTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Make the mileage reimbursement exclusion to the bus stop the same as for the distance to school - 3 miles. Limit all individual contract reimbursements to actual miles transported. ◆ Cap contracts for individual transportation at the level a family would receive for room and board reimbursement. ◆ Increase the rate for room and board from \$5.31 to \$8 per day for the first child and \$3.19 to \$5 for the second and subsequent child(ren). 	<p>► Included in bill draft.</p> <p>► Included in bill draft.</p> <p>► Included in bill draft.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Adopt operation and procedure guidelines for the county transportation committees. 	<p>► Legal parameters of guidelines included in bill draft.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">ELIGIBILITY FOR SCHOOL BUS RIDE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Make no change to the three-mile requirement. ◆ Initiate study and adopt a provision to make students under three miles, who are exposed to hazardous walking conditions, eligible for transportation. 	<p>► No action required.</p> <p>► OPI will initiate recommended study.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">COORDINATION OF SERVICES WITH OTHER TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Encourage collaboration between schools and other groups like senior citizen centers. 	<p>► Resolution drafted.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">EQUITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Replace the county transportation levy with a statewide mill calculated to raise the same amount. 	<p>► No action taken.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">OTHER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide regional training and certification workshops for drivers. Require inservice credits for drivers. Incorporate bus riding skills into curriculum for young riders. ◆ Adopt 15 years as the maximum age of a yellow school bus for subsidized bus routes. ◆ Recommend to all school districts that they undertake a yearly, thorough informational/public relations effort regarding pupil transportation. 	<p>► OPI will implement recommendations.</p> <p>► No action. OPI will release as a recommendation.</p> <p>► No action. OPI will release as a recommendation.</p>

I. MISSION

The group had as its overall goal to:

"review alternatives and recommend the best means to maintain an adequate, safe and economical access to education in Montana."

Three major areas were researched and discussed.

1. Funding Mechanism

- a. Equity
- b. Distribution Method
- c. Revenues/Expenditures
- d. Eligibility
- e. "Loopholes"
- f. Transportation Options
 - (1) Buses
 - (2) Individual Transportation
 - (3) Room & Board/Tuition
 - (4) Correspondence Courses
- g. Special Education

2. Efficiency Issues

- a. Duplication of Services
- b. Paperwork/Data Collection
- c. Coordination with Other Transportation Services
- d. Role of County Transportation Committee
- e. "Loopholes"
- f. Equipment/Fuel Purchasing
- g. Insurance

3. Image

- a. Selling/Promotion of Service
- b. Problems - Perception versus Reality
- c. Politics
- d. Inservice Needs

Meetings were held on the following dates:

May 18, 1994

June 20, 1994

July 20-21, 1994

August 16-17, 1994

September 8, 1994

II. TRANSPORTATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The state of Montana is rich and diverse in its demographic profile. With a population of 839,000 (1993 estimate) scattered throughout 147,046 square miles, the fourth largest in the United States, distances and transportation are major factors for all of its endeavors, including education.

- Size: 147,046 square miles (fourth largest state)
570 miles long and 315 miles wide
- Population Density: 5.6 per square mile
- Geographic Features:
Western one-third, mountainous and timbered
Eastern two-thirds, plains with occasional mountains
Elevation: 1,820 to 12,799 feet above sea level
- Indian Reservations: Seven

DEMOGRAPHICS/TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION	1992-1993	1993-1994
General Population	822,347	839,000
Student Population		
Elementary (PreK - 8)	115,233	116,650
Secondary (9-12)	44,737	46,370
Total	159,970	163,020
Public School Students per Square Mile	1.08	1.11
Average Number Eligible Students Transported at Public Expense	55,584	56,032
Students Under 3 Miles Transported (This number is not universally reported and is less than the actual number.)	11,939	11,980
Total	67,523	68,012
Number of Miles Traveled Per Year (This does not include activity routes, or routes not requesting reimbursement.)	18,388,152	18,490,140
Number of Individual Transportation Contracts Received by State	2,336	2,344
Estimate of Combined State and County Reimbursement for Individual Transportation Contracts (based on contract rates x 180 days)	1,112,170	1,103,515
Actual Expenditures (includes all transportation fund expenditures reported on districts' trustees reports)	35,085,570	(Trustees info not compiled yet.)
<u>Transportation Funding Sources</u> (As reported on trustees' reports)		(Trustees info not compiled yet.)
State	9,581,248	
County	9,721,766	
District	15,782,556	

BUS AND DRIVER DATA 1993-1994	
Qualified School Bus Drivers	2,894
School Buses By Type:	
Type A (Van Conversion under 10,000 lbs GVWR)	177
Type B (Van Conversion over 10,000 lbs GVWR)	45
Type C (Conventional Bus)	1,278
Type D (Transit Style-Flat Front)	333
No Indication of Type	151
TOTAL BUSES	1,984
School Buses by Owner:	
District Owned	1,046
Contractor Owned	867
No Indication of Owner	71
TOTAL BUSES	1,984
(These figures do not include over-the-road type passenger coaches used for activity trips.)	

ACCIDENT DATA 1992-1993	
Number of Accidents by Type	
Pedestrian	1
Collision with other motor vehicle	75
Collision with fixed object	8
On-board accidents	2
Other	3
TOTAL	89
Number of Accidents by Severity	
Fatal	0
Injury	3
Property	86
TOTAL	89

III. BENEFITS OF PUPIL TRANSPORTATION

After much discussion, the Task Force was unanimous in the belief that Montana needs a pupil transportation system to transport our students to and from school. Based upon the analysis of the following criteria, the current yellow bus fleet in Montana is clearly at the heart of such a system.

A. Safety

The yellow school bus has a proven record of being the safest vehicle on the road. The Task Force believes additional students would be at risk for serious injury and death if the yellow school bus is not used (driving on icy roads, walking in cold weather, increased traffic congestion around schools, etc.).

B. Access to Education

The Task Force believes there are students who would not get to school without it. They believe transportation is directly related to constitutionally mandated access to a free and appropriate public education. The task force reasoned that given the federal government believes transportation is a related service for special education, it follows that it should be a related service for general education too.

C. Equity

All students should have an equal opportunity to get to school. Costs of providing the transportation should also be equalized. (It was an issue in the school equalization lawsuit, but the legislature has not acted on it to date.)

D. Welfare

Some families are physically and economically unable to provide adequate transportation for their children.

E. Geographical Considerations

Montana is a rural state. In some areas, homes and schools can be great distances from one another. The Task Force believes parents should not bear the entire burden of transporting students. For instance, in the case of farming or ranching families, transporting the child to school can take a large portion of the parent's day away from the farm. Clearly, the current system is more efficient than a number of private vehicles travelling the same road.

F. Benefit to the General Public

School busing cuts down the number of cars on the road. It improves traffic flow. It is better for the environment, given the reduction of air pollution resulting from reduced traffic on the road twice a day. As well, it saves precious energy resources.

G. Logistics

School parking areas are not designed to serve the number of cars would be at the school each morning and afternoon if there were no buses. At high schools there could be increased demand for additional parking places.

H. Economics

The Task Force does not believe the private sector could provide services at a lower cost. It also believes there are areas in the state where it is not profitable to provide transportation. Therefore, transportation services would not exist in some areas if providing them were left to the private sector. There was also concern that safety standards might be lower if the provisions of school transportation were left to the private sector with no regulatory oversight. For instance, there would be less control over the quality/training of drivers and the safety features of buses.

I. Efficiency

By pooling resources, busing provides an efficient way to get children to school. It saves time and money for parents/guardians and taxpayers alike.

IV. FUNDING

The Task Force endorses the present state/county supported mileage reimbursement method with the following modifications.

Discussion: Given geographic variations of the state, the group believes a mileage reimbursement system is a fair and equitable way to distribute funds.

A. Method of Distribution

The Task Force decided to endorse the rates in the current mileage reimbursement method. However, they would like the record to note the rate of \$.85 per mile plus \$.0213 per each additional seat in the rated capacity over 45 does not come close to covering current costs.

Discussion: The group discussed adjusting reimbursement rates to reflect differences in conditions for urban versus rural routes or for routes with under 50 percent eligible riders. Some of the issues discussed included, gravel versus paved roads, high numbers of students on short routes versus low numbers of students on long routes, etc. The discussion centered on exploring ways to encourage more efficient use of buses and routes, individual contracts and cut down on abuses of the present system.

The group investigated alternatives for funding buses with low ridership; for instance, sliding scales for reimbursement (buses with less than 24, 15, 12, or 10 riders would receive a lower rate than 85 cents per mile or buses with 20 percent of the rated capacity being eligible riders receiving a lower reimbursement rate, etc.).

It was mentioned that basing the reimbursement rate on the percentage of eligible riders in the rated capacity may not encourage the best possible overall bus purchases for a district. The costs of running larger buses are not necessarily greater than the costs of running smaller buses and it may be uneconomical in the long run to encourage the use of the smallest possible bus. For instance, population growth projections may indicate a large bus should be purchased, or districts may require larger buses to accommodate other activities such as field trips and athletic events; problems may arise from the sizes of buses used by contractors, etc. All these issues should be considered when a district is purchasing a bus.

As well, the idea of reimbursing by student miles was considered. In the end, the Task Force decided that in many ways the present mileage reimbursement model is an equalizer.

B. Weighted Ridership

The Task Force recommends the following system of weighting riders to determine the capacity by which the reimbursement is calculated:

Students Grades K-8 =	1 seat	($\frac{1}{3}$ bench seat)
High School Students	1½ seats	($\frac{1}{2}$ bench seat)
1st Wheel Chair =	12 seats	(4 bench seats)
2nd Wheel Chair =	9 seats	(3 bench seats)
Additional Wheel Chairs =	6 seats	(2 bench seats)
Special Needs (504 or IDEA) =	3 seats	(1 bench seat)
(includes transportation as a related service on the IEP and/or special accommodations required)		

While the method above will be used to determine the level of reimbursement, the "rated capacity" posted on the bus will still be used to determine the maximum allowable number of riders.

Discussion: The Task Force believes that reimbursement based on the number of seats on the bus or the "rated capacity" of the bus should better reflect the number of students who actually fit on the bus under different circumstances. The official rated capacity of a bus is usually based on three students per seat. However, it is not realistic to think that three high school students will fit on a school bus bench seat. It would be more realistic to count high school students at a rate of two per seat. Presently, buses carrying special education students are automatically deemed "full" for reimbursement purposes. The Task Force is concerned that to receive full funding, more buses may be designated as "special education" than are needed. The lift equipment and space for the first wheelchair on a bus usually requires the space of four normal bench seats or the equivalent of 12 seats of the bus's rated capacity.

C. Special Education Buses

Given the discussion in Item B above, the Task Force strongly recommends that a special education bus no longer be automatically deemed "full" just because it carries one special ed student with an IEP requirement for transportation.

D. Ridership Reporting (Accountability)

The Task Force recommends determining reimbursement level qualification for grades 9-12 upon eligibility of ridership rather than mere eligibility. To implement this, it recommends taking an actual rider count for one five-day period per year for students in grades 9-12. The number used for reimbursement purposes will be the

day with the highest ridership during the five-day period. Counts will be taken on the morning route only.

The Task Force recommends taking the count during the time period around November 16-22. This is a low activity (sports) time period, and, therefore, represents a higher ridership period.

The Task Force further recommends this provision be directly tied to the weighted ridership recommendation. If the weighted ridership is not used, then this ridership count should also not be used.

It is further recommended that wording consistent with the intent of the following be adopted into Montana law:

All students in grades 9-12 who are assigned to a bus and transported at least once during the reporting period must be counted. All information will be recorded on a TR-1 form. The TR-1 forms are due to the Office of Public Instruction seven working days following the final date of the reporting period.

Eligible transportee counts will be taken on the morning routes for five consecutive days during the reporting period. Counts will be done on the following date:

November 16 - 22, or on 5 days within this general time period which accommodate the least amount of athletic and extra-curricular activities.

Each year the date of the reporting period will be established by the Superintendent of Public Instruction or designee.

The determination of eligible transportees will be based on the highest number of riders during the five days of the reporting period.

To be eligible for funding a student must meet at least one of the following conditions:

- 1. Resides at least 3 miles from school as per MCA 20-10-101.*
- 2. Is a special education student who has transportation as a related service listed on a valid Individualized Education Program (IEP) as per MCA 20-7-442 and ARM 10.16.2502.*
- 3. Qualifies as an eligible transportee because of hazardous walking conditions as determined by the County Transportation Committee and other applicable rules or statutes (if adopted).*

Discussion: The Task Force discussed the pros and cons of requiring schools to count the students that actually ride the bus and basing reimbursement on the number of eligible students that ride rather than on the number of eligible students that might potentially ride. The goal of this count is to base funding on a better representation of who is actually riding the bus. Counting actual riders would help provide explanations and

justification when questions arise about empty buses. The group engaged in a discussion which included concerns about:

- The ability to accomplish the same goal with a ticket-based system
- Seasonality of ridership
- Flu outbreaks during the counting period
- Timing of the counting period (morning or afternoon)
- Small district's ability to call parents and arrange to stack the count in their favor
- The age group that should be counted (7th-12th Grade?)
- The optimum number of counting periods that should be used
- The absence of a couple of students making the difference in the level of funding for a bus route
- Problems that could arise with the count the first year
- Will it really change anything? Will it result in fuller buses? Will it change the perception of the public?
- Ability of OPI to manage with the additional paperwork.

E. Individual Transportation Contracts and Room and Board

The Task Force recommends that the following changes be made to the conditions and stipulations of the Individual Transportation Contract and Room and Board:

- a. **Make the mileage reimbursement exclusion to the bus stop the same as for the distance to the school - 3 miles.**
- b. **Include contract language that the student must actually be living at the address used to calculate the mileage on the contract and that the student must continue to live at the address to continue to receive reimbursement.**
- c. **Increase the reimbursement for room and board from \$5.31 to \$8 per day for the first child and \$3.19 to \$5 for the second and subsequent child(ren).**
- d. **Set the maximum reimbursement that a family can receive for an individual contract to not exceed the rate received for room and board.**

Discussion: Rates for room and board have not been adjusted to reflect inflation for many years. In addition, there are families commuting to schools which have individual contracts for transportation that exceed the amount they would have received in a room and board provision. The Task Force believes it would help avoid misuse and control cost if the state adjusted the room and board provision to a more realistic level and limited individual contract amounts to the level of the room and board provision.

V. COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

The Task Force recommends the adoption of operation and procedure guidelines for the county transportation committees. It recommends adoption of language not inconsistent with the following which has been adapted from the document used by the Flathead County Transportation Committee:

Philosophy

The goal of the County Transportation Committee is to provide a safe, efficient and economical pupil transportation system within the county and to perform the duties set forth in 20-10-132, MCA, in a consistent and equitable manner.

Definitions

Transportation Service Area: A Transportation Service Area (TSA) defines the geographic area of responsibility for school bus transportation for each district that operates a school bus transportation program.

Bus Route: A bus route is any route approved by the Board of Trustees of the operating district and by the County Transportation Committee.

Route Change: Any change in an approved bus route.

Other definitions are contained in 20-10-101, MCA.

Meetings

Meetings will be called by the County Superintendent as needed, see 20-10-131 MCA.

In order to conduct business, a quorum of the committee must be in attendance. A quorum shall consist of a majority of the membership (20-10-131(3), MCA). Approval of a motion shall require the affirmative vote of a majority of the members present.

Bus Routes

All new routes and route changes must be approved by the County Transportation Committee. In emergency situations, temporary approval may be granted by the County Superintendent. Official action will be taken by the County Transportation Committee.

Any request for the consideration of a new route or for a change in an existing route must include the following:

- 1. Route map showing old and new routes*
- 2. Description of turnarounds*
- 3. Conditions affecting safety*
- 4. Total mileage and/or change in mileage*
- 5. Approximate total cost*

6. *Rationale*
7. *Number of children to be served*
8. *A copy of the official minutes of the school board meeting at which the trustees approved the new route(s) or route changes*
9. *Other criteria as determined by the local transportation committee*

Transportation Service Areas (TSAs)

Transportation service areas (TSAs) are normally defined by high school or elementary school district boundaries. However, when factors of pupil safety, efficiency or economics are in conflict with this, the county transportation committee may vote to adjust any TSA boundary.

Each TSA will be identified as elementary (grades K-8), high school (grades 9-12) or K-12. The high school TSA will encompass the TSAs of all elementary schools which are assigned to send students to that high school.

Bus routes will not be extended to pick up or discharge students outside their own TSAs unless a written agreement is approved by trustees of the TSAs involved or by direction of the county transportation committee.

When the trustees of two TSAs enter into a written agreement to authorize transportation between TSAs, a copy of that agreement must be submitted to the County Superintendent. Once approved, such agreements will remain in force for the current school year.

Individual Transportation

When an application for increased reimbursement for individual transportation is presented to the county transportation committee, it shall include the following:

1. *A fully completed, signed transportation contract (Form TR-4). There must be sufficient information to make a determination, pursuant to 10.7.116 ARM.*
2. *A copy of the official minutes of the school board meeting at which the trustees acted on the request for increased reimbursement.*

Applications for increased reimbursement due to isolated conditions will be considered and processed in accordance with 20-10-142 and any other pertinent statutes. A majority of a quorum of the county transportation committee must approve the request for increased reimbursement at an official meeting.

Penalties

A violation of any county transportation committee policies may result in a recommendation of temporary or permanent withholding of transportation reimbursement to the school district(s) involved as allowed by 20-10-104. Decisions based on false information will be considered null and void and must be reapproved following the same standards as were applied to the original request.

Discussion: The Task Force discussed at length the transportation problems encountered by students attending school out of their district of residence, including duplication of routes. This discussion included examples of the conflicts between districts arising from one district "raiding" another district and sending a bus to pick up the children in question.

Administrative Rules of Montana, 10.64.701, "Criteria for Establishing Transportation Areas" was read. The Task Force seemed to approve of the rule, but thought it needed to be expanded. The Task Force didn't make any specific recommendations with regard to this rule.

The Task Force determined that the majority of transportation problems should be addressed by the county transportation committee. However, the task force acknowledged that, presently, county transportation committees have varying degrees of effectiveness throughout the state.

Guidelines for county transportation committees would provide for statewide consistency. There would still be an appeals process for disputes.

Changing the composition of the county transportation committee might give it more balance and taxpayer representation. The Task Force was concerned that including more public members on the committee would cause more problems than it would solve. Often public members don't have the background they would need to deal with the issues and it is difficult to get committee members who are committed to the process. It is already difficult to get committee members to attend these meetings; having more public representation would make it even more difficult. The Task Force decided not to recommend changing the makeup of the county transportation committee membership.

VI. ELIGIBILITY

A. Three-mile limit

The Task Force makes no recommendation to change the three-mile eligibility requirements of MCA 20-10-101.

Discussion: The Task Force discussed the pros and cons involved in altering the three-mile limit for determining eligibility for reimbursement. Included in the discussion was debate about three miles being too long of a distance to expect young elementary students to walk. Debate centered around responsibilities of parents, additional costs to the state, county and districts that would arise from lowering the eligibility requirement, the number of new individual transportation contracts that could potentially arise, equity issues with regard to the arbitrariness of the three-mile limit, and specific problems that would arise in districts that have been built with the three-mile limit in mind (Miles City for example). The group discussed changes in society that make placing the burden on parents for getting children to school more difficult than it has been in the past.

B. Hazardous Walking Conditions

The Task Force recommends the state adopt a provision which will allow students who reside under three miles from their school of attendance, but are subject to hazardous walking conditions, to be deemed as eligible transportees and be subject to all the rights and privileges associated with eligible transportees over three miles.

It recommends adoption of language not inconsistent with the intent of the following into Montana law:

The school board of a district shall designate as hazardous those routes which cannot be safely traveled by students who live within the three-mile limit. The designation may recognize hazards such as ongoing construction that exist only part of the time and in these instances the designation shall be applicable only during the time the hazards are found to exist. Such conditions shall be inspected by a representative of the highway patrol. This representative shall determine whether or not the condition is hazardous to students and report it to the County Transportation Committee.

The hazardous route designation must be approved by the County Transportation Committee. If denied, an appeal may be made to the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

If approved, the student is then determined to be an eligible transportee.

Upon determination that a condition is hazardous to such a student, the district school board shall request a determination from the state or local governmental entity having jurisdiction regarding whether the hazard will be corrected and, if so, regarding a projected completion date.

State funds shall be allocated for the transportation of students subjected to such hazards, provided that such funding shall cease upon correction of the hazard or upon the projected completion date, whichever occurs first.

A hazardous route designation applies only during the period the hazard exists and for a maximum of one school year.

Upon passage, the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall establish a statewide task force that will set specific criteria for hazardous walking conditions and present them to the 1997 Legislature for their approval.

Discussion:

Pros

- Safety has always been a top priority with this Task Force. The state should be involved in student safety issues and the state should assist in funding routes where hazards exist.
- Guidelines would assist districts by giving clear direction about what should be considered a hazard. Districts would have something tangible to back up their decisions and explain to parents why routes are determined not to be hazardous.
- Although some districts already adequately recognize and respond to hazards, others do not. This would ensure that the subject is addressed in a more uniform fashion statewide.
- It is good public relations. The demographics of the state are changing. Hazards grow along with population growth. There is evidence that parents are concerned about this issue. School districts need to be responsive to the concerns of parents. It would be a small step toward accommodating the wishes of parents.
- The additional costs for reimbursing routes where real hazards exist would be insignificant.

Cons

- This issue should be left to local control. Districts can best determine whether a condition is hazardous and if a bus route would be appropriate.
- The number of requests for new routes could get out of hand. The discussions among the districts, parents, the county and state about determining when a hazard exists could be politically motivated. Parents could take advantage of the opportunity and use it as a method to make the district form a bus route under the three-mile limit. It could place undue hardships on the district.
- It could be expensive for the state to reimburse the number of additional bus routes this could generate.
- No two people agree what should be considered hazardous. It could be difficult, if not impossible, to develop statewide guidelines for determining when a hazardous condition exists.

VII. COORDINATION OF SERVICES

The Task Force encourages collaboration between schools and other transportation providers such as senior citizens and groups who serve the developmentally disabled. This collaboration may be in sharing resources and/or equipment to meet community and school transportation needs. However, any collaboration needs to be in compliance with the laws and regulations governing transportation.

Discussion:

Concerns

A. Safety

There was concern that it may not be adequately safe for students (especially grade school students) to ride on non-school buses where unknown members of the public could be riding at the same time, where bus drivers may not be aware of each student's individual needs, and where the buses may not have the same safety standards (Guideline 17) as school buses. The mass transit representative explained the requirements and opportunities available to their bus drivers and the requirements are quite similar as the ones required of school bus drivers.

B. Public Service Commission Issues

There was concern that if school buses went into the business of transporting other community groups, they may create unfair public competition for licensed private carriers who transport those groups. Depending on the circumstances, the school districts might violate commerce laws and could be charged. The task force should not encourage these violations.

Still, the majority of the group concluded that the concept of working with other transportation providers is worthwhile. The group is convinced there should be ways to combine resources, that with minor changes on both sides, and with guidance from the Department of Transportation and the Public Service Commission, opportunities for collaboration do exist and should be encouraged. An example might be when a senior citizen's group obtains a grant for a small lift equipped bus, through collaboration the bus could be ordered to meet Montana school bus standards. The district could use it to transport wheelchair bound students and in exchange provide maintenance to the bus and driver labor for the seniors.

VIII. EQUITY

The Task Force recommends elimination of county mill levies for transportation and in their place raising the same amount of money through a statewide mill levy (approximately 6 mills) or some alternative funding source.

Discussion: Alternative funding sources discussed included: a special transportation tax, gas tax, parent/guardian pay, or income tax credit. The group generally agreed that a special transportation tax or gas tax may be viable considerations; however, the group's recommendation is the statewide mill levy.

This discussion also included the suggestion of completely getting the state out of the transportation business, having the parents pay 100 percent or having the county fully fund the program. Questions also arose regarding what would happen to county transportation reserves if the county was completely removed from the equation.

IX. FORMS/INSERVICE

The Task Force recommends that regional workshops be developed to assist in the certification of bus drivers. These workshops would include:

- **Department of Transportation on-site bus driver exams.**
- **Workshops/materials for the written exam.**
- **First Aid classes.**
- **Other required training (i.e., drug & alcohol awareness).**

The Task Force also recommends that inservice credits be included in the formal requirements for bus driver recertification.

The Task Force further recommends that bus riding skills be incorporated into curriculum for young students.

Discussion: It was suggested that a form be developed for the reporting of information that would be useful to OPI in producing statewide data. For instance, a breakdown of transportation expenses or other items that would assist OPI when people request statewide information on transportation. School district personnel on the task force did not think it would be beneficial to their district to give that kind of information to OPI. In the past, that kind of information at the state level has been used as a justification in budget cutting. For example, District A doesn't need a transportation supervisor; therefore, why should District B? The Task Force voted against recommending the development of an information bank.

X. EQUIPMENT

The Task Force recommends 15 years as the maximum age of a yellow school bus to be used for the transportation of Montana public school students on subsidized bus routes to and from school.

The task force did not want to include recommendations for group equipment purchases at this time.

Issues regarding equipment age include ongoing development of new standards and safer buses, safety issues related to wear and tear and fatigue, and the recommendation of the national Transportation Research Board that all pre-standard (pre-1977) be removed from service as quickly as possible. The task force discussed using some sort of a phase-in of this policy. For instance, by the year 2000 no buses over 15 years old will be used. The task force initially discussed a 10-year maximum, but concluded 15 to be more realistic.

XI. PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Task Force recommends that all school districts undertake a yearly, thorough public relations effort that outlines the scope of operations, costs, benefits, and any anomalies that might cause misunderstanding (i.e., the bus with only a few students on it) of the district's pupil transportation system.

PUPIL TRANSPORTATION TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

Al McMilin, Chairman

Phone: 266-5512

- A. Montana Association of School Superintendents
(Nine positions appointed by MASS regional presidents)

WESTERN

Craig Brewington, Supt.
Hellgate Public Schools
2385 Flynn Lane
Missoula, MT 59802
728-5626
728-5636 FAX

NORTH WEST

Ryan Taylor, Supt.
Columbia Falls Public Schools
PO Box 1229
Columbia Falls, MT 59912
892-6550
892-6552 FAX

NORTH CENTRAL

Penny Bertelsen, Supt.
Sun River Valley Schools
Box 38
Simms, MT 59477
264-5110
264-5189 FAX

SOUTH EAST

Jim Stanton, Supt.
Baker Public Schools
Box 659
Baker, MT 59313
778-3329
778-2785 FAX

NORTH EAST

Dr. Patrick Stuber, Supt.
Culbertson Public Schools
Box 516
Culbertson, MT 59218
787-6246
787-6244 FAX

HI LINE

Dan Haugen, Supt.
Chinook Public Schools
PO Box 1059
Chinook, MT 59523
357-2628
357-2238 FAX

4 RIVERS

Al McMilin, Supt.
Townsend Schools
Box N
Townsend, MT 59644
266-3455
266-3448 FAX

SOUTH CENTRAL

Dan Nelson, Former Supt.
Broadview Public Schools
PO Box 106
Broadview, MT 59015
652-0998
667-2195 FAX

CENTRAL

Dennis Coulter, Supt.
Winifred Public Schools
Winifred, MT 59489
462-5349

- B. County Superintendents
(One position appointed by MACSS)

MACSS

Ellen Zook
County Superintendent of Schools
Custer County
1010 Main Street
Miles City, MT 59301
232-7800
232-7803 FAX

- C. School Transportation Director/Supervisor/
Mechanic (Two positions appointed by
Montana Association of Pupil Transportation)

MAPT

Gary Rose, Adm. Ass't.
Kalispell Public Schools
233 First Avenue E.
Kalispell, MT 59901
756-5015
756-4510 FAX

- MAPT
Alex Ferguson, Trans. Supv.
Cascade Public Schools
West End Central Avenue
Cascade, MT 59421
468-2212 WK
468-2700 HM
468-2212 FAX
- D. Montana School Bus Contractors
(One position appointed by MSBCA)
- MSBCA
Dale Duff
Rocky Mountain Transportation
1410 E. Edgewood Dr.
Whitefish, MT 59937
862-2539
862-8706 FAX
- E. Montana School Business Officials
(One position appointed by MASBO)
- MASBO
Warren Gamas
Glasgow Public Schools
Box 28
Glasgow, MT 59230
228-2406
228-2407 FAX
- F. Special Education Directors
(One position appointed by MCASE)
- MCASE
Brad Nimmick
Skyline Center
3300 3rd St. N.E.
Great Falls, MT 59404
791-2270
791-2277 FAX
- G. Parents
(Three positions, one a parent of a special ed student; one "very rural" parent over 35 miles from school; one "short distance" parent, 3-5 miles from school; all appointed by the Montana PTSA) *
- PTSA
Klarissa Jensen
900 Cherry Hill #D
Polson, MT 59860
883-4319
- H. Building Principals
(Two Positions appointed by MAEMP and MASSP) *
- MAEMP
Sharon Walker, Principal
Kessler Elementary School
2420 Chateau St.
Helena, MT 59601
442-0150
- I. School Board Trustee
(One position appointed by MSBA)
- MSBA
Bob Anderson, Executive Director
Montana School Boards Association
No. 1 South Montana
Helena, MT 59601
442-2180
- J. Teachers
(One position appointed by MEA)
- MEA
Scott T. McCulloch
611 Tabriz
Billings, MT 59105
652-7179 WK
248-5226 HM
- K. Headstart
(One position appointed by Headstart)
- HEADSTART
Royal Johnson
Rocky Mountain Development Center
PO Box 1717
Helena, MT 59624
442-7930
- L. Mass Transit
(One position appointed by Montana Transit Association)
- MTA
Orval Meyer, President
Montana Transit Association
630 No. Main
Helena, MT 59601
442-9333

- M. Para-Transit Providers
(Two positions, one appointed by Montana Association for Independent Disabilities Services (MAIDS), and one by the Montana Association of Area Agencies on Aging (M4A).

MAIDS
Dave Sutinen
Quality Life Concepts
PO Box 2506
Great Falls, MT 59403
452-9531

M4A
Randy Barrett, Director
Area VIII Agency on Aging
Box 202
Black Eagle, MT 59414
454-6991

- N. Government
(One from Governor's Task Force on Government appointed by Task Force--One Legislator)

GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE
Storrs Bishop
PO Box 667
Ennis, MT 59729

MONTANA HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES **
The Honorable Robert Clark
PO Box 216
Ryegate, MT 59074
568-2553

- O. General Public
(One member to be appointed by the Montana Chamber of Commerce)

MONTANA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
David Owen, President
MT Chamber of Commerce
PO Box 1730
Helena, MT 59624
442-2405

* Some positions remained unfilled by the organization asked to name members.

** The Honorable Robert Clark was not able to attend the meetings, but asked to kept informed of the work of the task force.

